Freya Stark, who is always interesting and whose descriptions of native life and architecture are fascinating and picturesque. But even this intrepid traveller is inclined to stress the poetical side of her experiences, and to leave out the realities of smell and dirt. For dirty and smelly Arabia is.

The villages have no drainage or sanitation; garbage and offal are thrown on a heap outside the houses, or on the sea-shore, there to be removed in time by those voracious scavengers, the vultures and kites. It is a common experience to see the carcases of donkeys and other livestock lying on the shore, swollen and covered with flies, decaying under the hot sun. The stench within half a mile of an Arab village is simply appalling; one would be truthful if unkind to describe the Arab as having no prejudices against filth. In their persons the lower classes are extremely dirty by European standards, although they can scarcely be blamed for not taking baths, since water invariably has to be carried for several miles from the wells on the backs of donkeys and is, consequently, expensive. The Arab workers are very poorly paid, and prefer to spend their small earnings on food for their families, and the rare luxuries in which they indulge. The current belief that the Arabs 'wash' themselves in the sand is an anomaly. According to the Koran they are supposed to carry out a certain number of ablutions during the year, especially during the fast of Ramadan and the anniversary of the Prophet's death. As water is scarce, they obey the Holy Book by making a token ablution with sand. Anyone familiar with the grimy grey sand one finds in the vicinity of a village will realize that, used as a 'cleansing' agent, it probably contributes to the sores and skin infections from which so many of them suffer.

Another serious cause of infection are the flies, which breed in that climate on a scale to be observed nowhere else in the world. I have seen a plate of fresh dates carried a few yards from one room to another across an open courtyard. By the time it reached the second room it would be covered with a mass of flies at least two inches deep. Incredible to the insect-free European, this must be seen to be believed. Yet the Arab would not think of cleansing food that had been thus contaminated. He nonchalantly sweeps away the flies with his sleeve and proceeds to masticate the polluted mess with relish.

Apart from the piles of offal and refuse which are a feature of every village, another inducement to flies are the windowless shops

in which dried fish, raw meat, ghee butter and other foodstuffs are openly displayed. These goods are always black with flies and as one drives through the narrow streets of the shopping centre a black, buzzing cloud obscures the windscreen. In summer it is much worse. The Arabs are curiously indifferent to this plague of dirt, bad odour and insects, and will sit for hours outside the shops, idly gossiping, while flies settle on their beards and faces, fall into their Turkish tea, or get mixed up with their rice. It is almost impossible not to swallow flies when one is talking, and the only remedy when in these districts is to keep one's mouth tightly shut. I have seen Arab babies lying in the open air, their eyes swollen and festered from some disease and covered with flies. Trachoma and cataract are common troubles among the Arabs, and it is surprising that epidemics of typhoid and dysentery are not frequent.

The blame for this state of affairs cannot be laid on the Arab peasantry, who are illiterate, badly paid and poorly nourished. They have been brought up for centuries in primitive surroundings and have come to regard their way of life as natural and even congenial. It is curious that where the poorer class of Arab has come into close contact with the American or Englishman he has imitated, in a bizarre and comic fashion, the Western style of dress, but he has stopped short at the more important aspects of our civilization. Perhaps, in his present state of culture, the Arab has an ingrained scorn of sanitation and health. By disposition, and owing to the intense heat of the summer months, he is a lazy individual, judged by our standards, working only when he must or when the fancy takes him. But there are deeper reasons for the Arab's tolerance of dirt and disease. To say that his attitude is inborn, as some visitors to the Middle East are prone to do, is begging the question.

The Arab has some admirable virtues, not the least of which is his strong sense of hospitality and charity. The poor man seldom goes away empty-handed, and the visitor is always sure of a meal, a resting-place for the night, and coffee. If not always strictly truthful, the Arab is unfailingly polite and his courteous manners would often put a European to shame. He has outstanding courage, particularly in battle, and despises meanness and immorality. He is frugal, kindly unless his fierce pride and spirit of independence are upset, and intensely religious. Indeed, what impressed me most about the Arabs of all classes was their extreme devotion to the faith of the Prophet, and their realistic interpretation of the Koran, which means more to them in their daily lives than the Bible means

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

beauty in their wiry branches and finely serrated leaves. In their shade the grasses grew tall and vivid, while around were masses of small yellow flowers which resembled the wild marguerite.

We had gone only a few miles when the station wagon broke down, necessitating a stop for repairs. While the engineer poked his head under the bonnet, I took a stroll in the valley and climbed the high sandbanks in order to observe the vegetation more closely. To my surprise, I found several varieties of flowers common to the English countryside growing in profusion in this wilderness. According to the notes I made at the time there were white campions, vetch, broom (the flowers were smaller than ours and lacking in perfume), sorrel, dandelion, convolvulus, a small yellow flower which resembled 'Old Lady's Slipper', and camel-grass; the last-named having a segmented stalk and spear-like leaves not unlike bamboo, of which it may be a distant relative. This grass grew to a height of nearly four feet.

There were also clumps of *ashgar*, the rubbery-leaved bush which exudes a highly-poisonous sap, and whose dark purple flowers have a passionate, poppy-like beauty. The sandy ground was full of burrows made by rock lizards, rabbits and desert rats, though I saw none of these animals on this stage of the journey. Locusts and grasshoppers were plentiful, and I saw several Red Admiral, Tortoiseshell and Comma butterflies, also a large black ant marked with white spots, with elongated legs which raised its body an eighth of an inch above the ground.

The engine repaired, we drove on for another twenty miles, until the granite ridges of Ruus-al-Jibal came into sight. This range of hills, which stretches from the northernmost tip of the peninsula to as far south as Muscat, varies in height from 2,000 to 8,000 feet. Commanders of aircraft using this route have assured me, however, that the latter figure is an error, and that the maps are incorrectly marked. The mountains looked blue in the distance, as all mountains do, but as we approached them the dark patches became honey-coloured cliffs, and the light sweeps turned into ridges and plateaux of variegated strata. As mountains go, they are not beautiful in the æsthetic Alpine sense, yet there is a certain grandeur about their irregular peaks and the ragged angles of the cliffs. The violet and pink slopes were most soothing to our desert-tired eyes.

In an unexpected dip in the valley we came upon a herd of camels grazing on the tender thorn leaves; there were about six calves

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

233 amongst them and, at the approach of our cars, they reared in terror and loped awkwardly towards a defensive buttress of rock. One supercilious parent stood his ground, eyeing us with a bilious look in which both reproach and indignation were combined; he thrust out a pendulous lip and roared like a miniature lion. Further on we met the owners of the herd, a group of Bedouin Arabs, who were squatting on the sand, eating dates and chipatties. Mauser rifles, embellished with silver bands, were slung over their shoulders and, although they looked fierce enough to cut our throats at the slightest provocation, they cheerfully answered the '*Subbuk ala'l bukhair*' with which the Khan Sahib greeted them.

We were about twenty miles from our objective, the little seaport of Mahrid (which is separated from the town of Ras-al-Khaimah by a wide creek), when the station wagon again broke down and had to be finally abandoned. The engineer, who informed us that a defective petrol pump was the cause of the trouble, volunteered to remain behind with the driver until we returned with a tow rope. The road became worse as we set forth again, the steering wheel frequently being wrenched out of the coxswain's hands as the truck was flung down sharp escarpments or rolled down soft banks of deep sand. When we reached a small village, unnamed on the map, the habitations of which consisted of rude barousti huts, the track disappeared in a clump of neam trees and we narrowly escaped falling into a newly-dug well.

The villagers clustered around our car and successfully misdirected us on to a road leading in the opposite direction to that which we desired to take. Fortunately a mud wall and a dead camel barred our progress and we stopped the truck, while the Khan Sahib and myself reconnoitred the environs of the village to get our bearings. When one is lost in a patch of desert it is no easy matter to retrieve one's position on the map. We decided that
136 our road lay to the left, and returned to the car and the dead camel,
825 over which hovered, in vicious anticipation, a flock of scrofulous vultures and hawks.

These revolting creatures are venerated by the Arabs, as they are very efficient scavengers and in a few days will pick a carcase clean, so that in a short time one returns to find nothing left but a perfect skeleton or sun-bleached bones scattered over the desert. It is a serious offence to shoot a vulture, which the Arabs call *nasir*. They never attack a living creature, as the eagle will do, but hover above it

directly it shows signs of dying. I was told that they will follow a sick donkey for miles, circling lazily in the air and greedily awaiting the moment when the animal will totter to its knees and slowly expire.

A patriarchal-looking Arab in a brown silk *abbas* came towards us and greeted the Khan Sahib with affection. He told us that he belonged to the retinue of the Sheikh Raschid, who was camping in the hills nearby. Apparently the sheikh was on a hunting expedition and had shot several gazelle and *houbari*, the lesser bustard. We declined his invitation to take coffee with the sheikh, as this would have meant a delay of at least an hour, and time was pressing; so he gave us very exact instructions for finding the road to Mahrid. This meant crossing a wadhi, where the ground was still soggy and uncertain for heavy vehicles, but with luck and good driving we crossed it without mishap. A grubby Arab boy appeared from behind a neam tree and, jumping on our running board, insisted on showing us the way; we did not begrudge him the lift and, as it transpired, he really was helpful.

The way meandered through a field of perfumed clover, a small-leaved variety with tiny yellow flowers. The scent was reminiscent of mimosa and was so strong as to be almost overwhelming. Hundreds of bees, attracted by the smell, filled the still air with their murmuring. The Arabs collect large quantities of honey from this district, and it is all made from the scented clover-pollen. The mountains now loomed titanically above us, grim and lowering, and ten miles to the west we could see the spires and towers of Ras-al-Khaimah reflected in the clear blue waters of the creek.

At the foot of the hills the softer green of the grass was shaded by dark avenues of neam trees, plantations of date palms, and the summer gardens of the wealthier residents. We had eight miles to go before we reached Mahrid, and it was already noon. We felt hungry and thirsty, and longed for the cool veranda of the Khan Sahib's house, with prospects of sherbet, *haloua* and cheese. At that moment—such is the perversity of life—our truck gave a convulsive cough and refused to budge further. A quick inspection by our driver revealed that we had run out of petrol.

No course was open to us other than to alight from the overheated vehicle, light pipes or cigarettes, and sit down to talk the situation over. We had a faint inkling of how the Army at Tobruk and Marble Arch must have felt in a similar predicament, only with Messerschmitts and Junkers zooming overhead, and how they

[Near Mahrid--Analyst]

000 of the war, when certain types of aircraft were unreliable and pilots inexperienced in desert conditions. A hundred yards away, on a hill surrounded by barbed wire, was the English cemetery. Here, a dozen little white wooden crosses marked the last resting places of men who would never again see the green fields and lanes of Kent or Yorkshire. Overhead, in the hard blue sky, the vultures soared and on the rocks the lizards scurried from the shadows of their wings.

A rough track in the sand led to the tower; it had been made by American trucks, the drivers of which had been hunting gazelle 712 or houbari, the wild bustard. The tower, which was about sixty feet high, was built of large stones cemented together with *juss*, the local mortar. Situated on the highest part of the sandhill, a view of at least twenty miles could be obtained from the crenellated top. At dusk the sheikh's Askhari guards would take their stand beside a little peep-hole in the walls, on the look-out for any raiders who might venture into Sharjah territory. In the daytime a round boulder, cunningly camouflaged with rags to look like a human head, would be affixed to the battlemented top, and the effect of this simple deception was most realistic. For several weeks I was convinced that an Arab sentry was on guard there, even when I inspected it through Zeiss field-glasses, and it was only when I climbed the tower with one of the sheikh's sons that I discovered the trick. These towers are a regular feature of every Arab town in Oman, and one sees scores of them dotted all over the landscape, looking rather like old Norfolk mills without their sails.

133 A high ridge of dunes rises gradually behind the tower, and 137 from the top of these one has an amazing view of the distant mountains. Gilded by the late afternoon sun, the peaks and passes assume changing colours, varying from deep purple to misty violet and terra-cotta pink. The desert beyond the dunes changes in character, due probably to the presence of subterranean streams, and one finds miniature *wadhis* and *nullahs* luxuriant with neam copses, and mossy banks where lush grass grows between tiny desert daisies and dandelions. In these banks I have found clumps of those edible fungi, the *fagar* and *tartuth*, both Arab delicacies, bushes of wild berries, and stunted thorn trees called, I believe, Spici Christi.

136 Unfortunately my knowledge of botany and zoology is abysmally limited, and I was unable to identify many species which were unfamiliar to me; as a scientific record of wild life in the Gulf

1 - [The Sheikh's watch-tower 5 miles east of Sharjah]

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

—which this book makes no pretence to be—my remarks are of little value. All I did was to make notes and sketches of what I saw. Thus it required no expert to identify the sand-piper skipping across the dunes; a sprightly, stone-coloured bird with a chirruping cry resembling the song, much amplified, of a cricket. On a neam tree my companion spotted a blue jay, more subdued in colouring than its European cousin, and took a snapshot of it before it took alarm and dived with flashing wings into a bush. Other species which haunt this valley are the hoopoe, known to the Arabs as *Upupa*, three of which I saw in July; the blue-headed wagtail, which has a rich yellow throat and belly and slate-blue back; the desert wheatear, stonechats, a small white owl, and a species of nightjar. Doves were fairly common in the groves of neam trees, whilst I saw numerous varieties of hawks and falcons.

A bird of passage in the Oman peninsula is the tiny green bee-eater (*Merops Orientalis*), a small colony of which I observed for several days in a clump of date palms, whilst a more frequent visitor was the roller, or blue jay (*Coracius Bengaliensis*), an emigrant from India. It has a lazy, undulating flight, and a harsh, corvine cry; its wings in flight are barred light and dark blue. In the valley beyond the tower small lakes of stagnant salt water are sometimes formed, the remnants of floods or high tides, and on these I have seen the white cattle egret (*Bulbulculus Ibis*), grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*), and wild duck.

What thrilled me as much as any of these was the little desert lark, which trilled its silvery notes high up in the blazing sky, or the kingfisher, flashing its silvery-blue wings across a *wadhi*. It was because they were so unexpected in this arid waste that they gave such pleasure. Most of the birds one finds in Oman are migrants from India and Africa, although the former predominate.

Of insects the most numerous are flies; black, buzzing flies of many species, which settle on one's head and shoulders in swarms; in the village booths they hover above the unsavoury dried meats and fish, dense clouds of them arising as you pass. There is a very interesting spider to be observed amongst the scrub in which it hides; less than a quarter of an inch long and half as broad, it curls up its legs when touched and looks just like a half-ripe wild strawberry. The Arabs say its bite is poisonous, but I have held one in the palm of my hand without being bitten. Suleman Beg, our Indian sayce, once told me that the presence of these spiders indicates rain.

136 Locusts, of course, are the commonest insects of the desert next to flies, and the Anti-Locust Commission despatched to Oman by the Middle East Supply Organization has helped very greatly in their extermination by poisoning their breeding places. Dragonflies, larger than the English species, though less colourful, are common in the winter months, as are the red admiral, comma and tortoiseshell butterflies. Of ants, the soldier may be found in date plantations; otherwise the only other species I have seen is the black ant, equal in size to the English wood ant. Beetles are numerous, the most conspicuous being the black scarab, a fascinating creature to watch as it rolls little balls of dung along the sand.

137 Close to the watch-tower there is a little dell where tamarisk trees flourish for no apparent reason; their roots are exceedingly long, since each year they plunge further into the sand in search of water. My Indian gardener, Toni, attempted to dig one of these up as I thought it would look attractive if re-planted in front of the Fort. He found the task impossible; although the bush was barely five feet in height, the roots were still uncovered when he had excavated to a depth of seven feet. Anything seems to grow in this dell, from cinquefoil to ashkar plants, and I considered it would make an excellent flower and vegetable garden.

000 The Sheikh of Sharjah gave permission for me to cultivate the area, but when I explained to headquarters that, in order to grow vegetables in a satisfactory manner, at least twenty wells would have to be dug, six Indian gardeners employed, and a five-foot wall erected to keep out thieves and stray donkeys, the matter was discreetly shelved. A garden is possible in the desert, as has been proved at the Sheikh's Wells and in the Fort, but only at considerable expense. At present it is cheaper to send fresh vegetables to Sharjah by air, since they occupy little space in an aircraft.

137 Wild vegetation is sparse, except in the valleys, and consists mostly of scrub, a variety of stonecrop (whose stems contain reservoirs of fresh water), tamarisk, ashkar, and a grey, harsh-leafed, spiky plant I failed to identify. The desert is a paradise for rock-garden enthusiasts, and one finds many varieties of miniature plants, each with its tiny, star-shaped blooms of pink, white or yellow. After the rains grass comes up suddenly in hollows or beneath the neam trees, and the damp top soil is often covered with mushrooms, truffles, orchids and desert lilies. The desert truffle is a long-stemmed fleshy plant, shaped like a fat drum

stick, with a pink, cone-like tip. This plant, together with its black roots, is much favoured by the Arabs as a delicacy. More unexpected was the discovery of a solitary orchid, with red and yellow flowers spotted with black, in shape and size resembling a hyacinth. I did not see another specimen during the whole time I was in Arabia.

After the bare, flat desert which surrounded the Fort it was a pleasant relief to glimpse this panorama of small *wadhis*, clumps of feathery acacia and neam trees and the wig-like camel thorn. Here the desert surges like a green and brown sea, until it meets the mountains of the Shamailiyah at the horizon, the peaks of which look deceptively closer than their seventy miles. Herds of camel and gazelle graze peacefully at the scrub, and flocks of bustard settle in the hollows; in a little gulley, between the roots of two large neam trees, I saw a small, honey-coloured fox emerge from his hole. At sunset one can hear the eerie call of the wild dog, whilst nearer to the mountains the grey wolf hunts in packs and creates havoc amongst the Bedouins' flocks of goats and sheep.

Mr. Williamson, a geologist employed by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, told me that he had shot a leopard in the mountains; but I never saw one myself and believe they are extremely rare in Oman. The commonest marsupial of all, of course, is the cheeky little desert rat, with its bat-like ears and long kangaroo legs.

One evening the Khan Bahadur drove me over to his garden at the Sheikh's Wells. It consists of about an acre of sandy ground with concrete channels for irrigation. A power-pump has been installed, but is not working, and the gardeners obtain water from the wells by means of buckets attached to long ropes. The garden is shaded by palm trees, fig trees, pomegranates, zinnas, cotton trees, limes, acacias and a tall maple species known as ticoma. The soil has been well manured and is fertile, producing excellent marrows, onions, brinjals (ladies' fingers), pumpkins, radishes and gherkins. Adjoining this garden some of the villagers have their own smallholding. We used to supply them with vegetable seeds, and, in return for their labour in growing the plants, we offered to buy the produce at slightly less than the market price. Needless to say, nothing ever came up! Each garden is about an acre in extent, and is divided into about twenty sections, each of which belongs to a smallholder; there is a well to every four sections.

Although I paid frequent visits to Captain Bird's official residence

sailed it across the Gulf single-handed, landed at Jask at night and, eluding the Persian guards, crept into the offices. He made several trips back and forth in this manner, carrying armfuls of files, books, papers and records. Finally he set fire to the huts and ran down to the shore under fire from the sentries' rifles. Abdul returned in safety to Sharjah and presented the Station Manager with about half a ton of 'bumph' for which he had risked his life. If there were such a thing as a Civil Servant's Medal I feel sure old Abdul is entitled to it.

I decided to spend the following week as a convalescent, and handed over my principal duties to McGilvray, the red-headed South African Traffic Officer. One afternoon, when a Sunderland flying-boat was due to make a landing at Dubai, I decided to accompany the party. It was a hot and uncomfortable drive, but it was cool inside the rest-house and Haider soon made us iced tea with lemon, and produced some delicious sausage-rolls. We were just building a small control tower on the roof, and it was pleasant to climb to the top and sit in a deck chair; there was invariably a fresh sea breeze on the roof, and one had a magnificent view of the distant mountains at Ras-al-Khaimah, seventy miles away and of the blue-green creek and the town of Dubai beyond.

Whilst the flying-boat discharged its passengers I wandered along the creek shore and picked up some fine specimens of shells, including mother-o'-pearl, and pieces of branch-like coral. This coral is pure white and delicately perforated, resembling Honiton lace; sometimes pink mollusc shells are found adhering to it, and these are used by the Arabs as pin trays. The shore is littered with rocks, garbage, bones and refuse from the boats, and occasionally one comes across the carcase of a donkey. Hundreds of crabs dart into their mud-holes as one approaches, and the rocks swarm with tiny lizards of a peculiar grey colour. It is surprising to find flowers growing amongst the decayed sea-wrack, but I have dug up several sea poppies and desert lilies—a yellow-flowered plant resembling a hyacinth—which were successfully transplanted in the Fort garden.

I watched the flying-boat take off on its long journey to Karachi, and joined the coxswain and the others at the end of the little jetty. Jock asked me if I would like a trip down the creek to Dubai in the launch, so we crowded into the small vessel and began to chug down-stream at a pleasant twelve knots. Dubai is a much more attractive town than Sharjah, and about twice as large; palm and

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

487 seaport famous to mariners for its watch-towers which guard the hills behind the town, we forked right and drove along the main caravan route to Falaj-al-'Ali, which is rather rough and tortuous.

487 The first ten miles beyond Umm-al-Quwain were monotonous,
133 a flat expanse of brownish grey desert, unrelieved by the slightest
137 elevation. We were above sea-level, but the high dunes behind the town obscured all but a shimmer of blue horizon. Later we entered a *batah*, a depression or valley resembling the *Jiri* at Ras-al-Khaimah. This valley, some ten miles long, between terraces of steep sandhills, was luxuriant with acacia trees, both of the *gharf* (flat-topped) and *sumr* (tall) varieties; there were also species of furze and broom, bamboo grass, *abal* and *ashgar* bushes, camel thorn and the thorny *Spici Christi*.

It was astonishingly green, rather like an English glade, so that one half expected to find violets and primroses growing under the clumps of *neam* trees. Water must have been plentiful here, for we saw numerous wells and passed scattered groups of camels grazing on the dry grasses and *abal* bushes. Flowering plants were numerous, including one with tiny white petals, with a furry, grey-green leaf, which none of us could identify; also a yellow-
● 136 flowering clover which smelt like mimosa. There were a great many locusts, both hoppers in the gregarious stage, and large yellow adults (solitary stage), and I captured several specimens in the glass bottle which Captain Joyce, of the Anti-Locust Commission, had given to me. Anyone travelling in the desert is usually requested to report the presence of locusts, since the agents of the Commission are thus able to track the movements, feeding and breeding grounds of these destructive insects.

Other insects we noticed, on stopping at Falaj-al-'Ali for a smoke and a cup of tea, were large black ants with white spots, a leaf-cutter bee (*Megachile*), a large black beetle of the *Rhytinota reichei* species, grasshoppers, butterflies, including a red admiral and a comma; we also saw a 'bacon beetle', common in this part of Oman, which feeds on dry carcases. The ant was unlike any species I had ever seen in the desert. It was a quarter of an inch long, with five white spots on its back (wings); a thin, elongated neck separated the head from the body, and the spidery legs were almost a quarter of an inch from the ground, giving it a curious jerky walk. Jasim said that its bite was poisonous.

Shrikes and larks (*hamra*) darted from behind the sandstone rocks as we approached, and although we looked for their nests we found

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none. Our most amusing find was that of a *dhabbi*, a small yellow lizard with a spatulate tail, which it uses as a spade for burrowing into the sand; it also uses this tail as a paddle and can travel quite fast by this means. Various species of reptiles are found in this region, including a large grey lizard, measuring almost four feet at full growth, the flesh of which is edible. Among snakes there is the common adder and a species of krait, smaller than the Indian genus, but highly poisonous. We saw none of these on this journey, however.

We returned to our cars and were about fifteen miles beyond Umm-al-Quwain and in sight of the plantations of Falaj-al-'Ali when we came upon the camp of the Anti-Locust Commission. We hoped to see Joyce, but he was away in the desert towards Shinas, and we spoke instead to his foreman, an Indian entymologist from Bombay. He told us that they had completed their work of collecting and checking specimens in the area, and were now laying traps and arsenical baits. They boasted that they would destroy at least ninety-five per cent of the larvæ in this district, which I found hard to believe. The foreman mentioned that his party would remain in the desert for twenty-one days and had just enough rations for that period.

The members of the Commission, who are all Indians except Captain Joyce, receive about four rupees a day in addition to their rations and equipment. When they penetrate far into the interior guides and guards are provided by the sheikhs of the locality, at suitable remuneration. These guides will never enter the territory of another tribe, so that fresh arrangements have to be made for each tribal area. The party seldom suffered from molestation, partly because Captain Joyce invariably goes ahead of them and makes arrangements with the tribes for their safety, but they are not popular with the Bedouins; this is partly because they do not trust foreigners, even Indians, and partly because they do not believe they are hunting for locusts. Even Sheikh Mahommed, who is a highly intelligent man, told me that he suspected they were secretly searching for minerals or making maps. From the propertied sheikhs, on the other hand, the Commission receives every assistance, as they are anxious to keep the pests away from their crops. The Bedouins, who do no work and grow nothing but a little millet or tobacco, are not interested in locust suppression; in fact, locusts form a part of their diet.

Falaj-al-'Ali lay five miles beyond the camp, but we skirted the

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the headman[1], a fine-looking old Arab 576
with a white beard and keen eyes, came forward to greet us and introduced us to the local gentry.

They shook us by the hand, the kiss of honour being reserved for Sheikh Hamid alone. Salim bin Raschid, the headman, amazed us by declaring that he had anticipated our visit. When we enquired how this was, he merely shook his head and smiled. The only explanation I can give is that some servant of the Residency Agent's at Sharjah had passed the information to a friend, and that the news had been conveyed to Djaidh by a passing caravan. The argument against this is that the decision to make the journey was only made by Captain Tandy the day previously, although he had discussed it with Jasim.

The headman allowed me to take a photograph of him and insisted on shaking my hand again when I had done so. The Arabs do not shake hands vigorously, as we do, but in a gentle, feminine way, letting the tips of their fingers linger in your palm. Accom- 312
panied by the notables, we inspected the wells, where stalwart young negroes at once assumed an air of great preoccupation and began hauling at the winches and emptying the full baskets which came up. We peered down the well and could just see the heads of the labourers working in the channel. The headman said they had just cleared the well base after a heavy fall of sand, and had increased the height of the roof to eight feet. He assured Tandy that the work was making good progress and that he would be personally responsible to the Sheikh of Sharjah for its continuance.

We spent half an hour at the wells, where Tandy and William- 487
son engaged in technical discussions with the Arab engineers, and 133
then took the road leading to the Beni Quitab encampment. No one seemed to know quite where it was, except that it lay towards the lower slopes of Jebel Faiyah, and was about twelve miles distant. Salim lent us a couple of guides, who clung precariously to the running board as we plunged across the river bed and sped up the steep, grass-covered banks. Here we entered a country which looked very much like the veldt of South Africa; in fact, just the sort of terrain in which one expects to find lions.

This country, called by the Arabs *Marbakh abu Laila*, extends 487
at the foot of the mountains from Muraq-qibat to Baraimi, a 133
distance of nearly a hundred miles, and is about ten miles in width. 136
It is completely wild, the haunt of gazelle, hares, mountain wolves and occasionally the rare, long-horned oryx. It was here, many years ago, that Williamson shot a leopard, an animal which previous

1 [at Djaidh -- Analyst]

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

travellers had declared did not exist in Oman. There was no road and the ground was hard and very bumpy, full of holes and nullahs. Tall grasses and shrubs grew in profusion, including *shinan* and the sea-green *harm* as well as some *Hadh* bushes, indicative of recent rain or heavy dews. The yellow flowers of the *zahr* blossomed in abundance, attracting myriads of insects, whilst several hares darted ahead of our truck and scurried away into their holes. The acacia (*samr*) trees grew in thin copses and were frequently fifteen feet high, which is unusual in this part of the desert.

When we had traversed five miles of this wooded country without so much as a trace of human life, our guides became nervous and begged to be allowed to return to Djaidh. We let them go, giving them a handful of biscuits and some tobacco as a gift, but before they left us they pointed to a site some two miles ahead where, they said, the *Badu* had last encamped. When we came upon this site we did, indeed, find the remains of a camp, the grass being lighter in patches than the surrounding herbage, whilst nearby was an old well and the dead embers of a fire. But of the *Badu* there was no sign.

We sat on a hillock for a few minutes, drinking tea, while Tandy and Williamson made a survey of the land; there were no tracks to guide us and nothing to indicate where the *Badu* might have concealed themselves. Sheikh Hamid, an amusing raconteur, recounted tales of the Beni Quitab tribe. These nomads number several thousand and, split into various sections, they roam all over the Oman country; branches of this tribe are to be found in the Nejd and Kuwait, but these have separate sheikhs and do not owe allegiance to Mohammed bin Ali. They are a wild, simple people, despising both the town dwellers and those who work with their hands. They live on dates, which they mostly steal, camels' milk, fish and rice. Some of these commodities they are obliged to buy, and the money for this purpose they obtain by selling camels, animal skins, including wolves, lizard and ibex; donkeys, wild honey, cheese and gazelle meat.

The Beni Quitab are famous camel breeders and during our trip across the *Marbakh* we saw large herds of these animals with their calves. They also breed donkeys, capturing the wild asses when young, and gather wild honey from the plains. Although they do as little work as possible, they cultivate small patches of ground to which they return twice a year, growing millet and tobacco, which they smoke in tiny pipes with cane stems.

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The camels were exceedingly thirsty and greedily drank the dirty grey water which Sayid bin Salih, the cameleer, brought to them in a bucket. There were a few crops of the *abal* bush for them to graze upon, and Hadi put some of these in his pot to boil with the rice, as a substitute for vegetables.

We had made good progress so far and were four days out from Sharjah; although it was early afternoon when we reached Idd the weather was hot and humid, the barometer registering 90° F. There was no point in tiring either the camels or ourselves, so we decided to encamp here for the night. The Arabs lay down under their tents and went to sleep, whilst Schultz and I explored the neighbourhood. As far as the eye could see the desert was bare of vegetation, with occasional dunes and ridges of hard sand and limestone conglomerate. In the distance, by the aid of our glasses, we could see the dim outlines of a peak or large hillock, which we estimated to be fifty miles due south of our camp.

The desert sloped gently away from Idd towards an unbroken steppe, littered with outcrops of volcanic rock and sandstone boulders. Two miles away we were surprised to find a shallow depression, about two hundred yards long, with pink sandstone walls rising to fifty feet in places. These cliffs were studded with tiny fossil shells, similar to the molluscs I had picked up on Sharjah beach. The skeleton of an ibex, still covered with its skin, lay in the sand beside a dead *abal* bush. The creature had evidently died from starvation. Of other forms of animal life there were no signs, and we did not even see an insect in this pit of death; on our way back to the camp, however, Schultz spotted a fork-tailed lark, which, according to Mr. Philby, is one of the few birds which inhabit the interior of the Rub-al-Khali.

Ahmed bin Aziz, one of the guides, greeted us with some excitement when we got back to the camp and said he had seen a bustard (*houbari*) flying overhead; he had fired at it, but it was too high to hit. Neither Schultz nor myself had heard a shot, which we supposed was due to the curious formation of the dunes, which had a trick of muffling sound. We had heard that there were so-called 'singing sands' in this region, which gave forth a booming sound, but the guides were unable to give us any information concerning this. In the camp we found a small mantis and two red spiders but, owing to the scarcity of vegetation, there was scarcely any animal life here.

let, and milk are staple articles of diet, and may be supplemented by fish, meat and vegetables, depending upon the resources of the individual families.

Although trails link the principal towns of Trucial Oman and Muscat, coastwise dhow traffic forms the chief means of communication. Steamers from Indian to Persian Gulf ports call irregularly at Dibai and Sharja. A flying boat station and an airport are located at Dibai and Sharja, respectively, and are used occasionally by commercial airlines.

ENVIRONMENT AND SANITATION

Water is scarce throughout most of this region. Supplies for domestic and irrigation purposes are obtained from springs, wells and rain-water cisterns, but underground sources are unreliable, except in limited areas north of Dibai. Artesian waters are found chiefly in the vicinity of Sharja. The western part of the territory is particularly arid: water for Abu Dhabi is transported by boat from Dibai.

The standards of sanitation are generally low. The methods of sewage disposal are primitive, and, although latrines are employed in the towns, indiscriminate pollution of the soil is a widespread practice.

The insects and the animals of medical importance native to Trucial Oman are comparable with those encountered under similar environmental conditions along the eastern coast of Arabia. Few entomologic studies have been recorded, but *Anopheles culicifacies* is known to be present, and is regarded as the principal vector of malaria. It breeds prolifically in wells, cisterns and irrigation ditches. *A. stephensi* also has been identified at Khor al Kalba, and is probably a vector in some localities. Flies are plentiful in towns and villages, and several species undoubtedly are implicated in the transmission of intestinal and eye infections.

HEALTH SERVICES AND MEDICAL FACILITIES

Public health services are almost non-

164 Over 50 per cent of the individuals treated
[758] in the oil company dispensary in 1950 were suffering from conjunctivitis.

164 Skin infections are prevalent. Where
312 water is scarce the Moslem tribes sometimes
228 employ sand in the ablutions required according to religious rites. As a consequence, many acquire infections in existing abrasions of the skin. Ulcers on legs and arms are observed repeatedly. Skin diseases are reported to be particularly evident among the pearl divers.

164 Leprosy is present, but no studies have
361 been made to determine the distribution of the infection. Some tribes are said to ostracize lepers and to require them to live in segregated colonies.

Diseases Spread by Arthropods

164 Malaria is highly endemic in the towns
136 and agricultural areas, while extensive outbreaks are reported from time to time. Transmission probably is most active from April to June and from October to January, as in the oases on the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia. All forms of the disease are encountered, but outbreaks usually are attributed to *Plasmodium falciparum*. *P. vivax* predominated among the cases in which the type was determined at the oil company dispensary in 1950. Among 17 cases treated in that year, 5 were classified as due to *P. vivax*; 3, to *P. malariae*; 1, to *P. falciparum*; while 8 were not identified.

Outbreaks of sandfly fever and dengue fever are recorded occasionally, but the incidence of other arthropod-borne diseases is uncertain.

SUMMARY

162 Trucial Oman, formerly designated as the
161 "Pirate Coast," comprises 7 independent
361 sheikhdoms on the eastern coast of Arabia, near the entrance to the Persian Gulf. The population is heterogeneous, although predominantly Arab and Moslem. In 1951, it was estimated at 80,000, including about 10 per cent belonging to nomadic Bedouin tribes.

487
[136]

sloping gently down to the sea. Gazelle were sighted, and the soldiers fired excitedly from the back of the moving truck. No hits were scored, but a friendly scuffle ensued when it was found that the person who had been firing the most had been helping himself to a companion's ammunition.

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